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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet on autism is offered in both English and Spanish, and is the same in both languages although numbered differently. It provides a definition, information on incidence, typical characteristics, and educational implications. It notes that autism is listed as a separate category under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The fact sheet emphasizes the importance of teaching the child communication skills and structuring the child's environment. Five print resources and three organizations are listed. (DB)

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NICHCY

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General Information About

AUTISM

✧ Definition ✧

Autism is a developmental disorder which usually becomes evident before the age of three years. It is a neurological or brain disorder in which behavior, communication, and social interactions are the primary disabilities.

✧ Incidence ✧

The rate of incidence, or how often autism occurs in children, ranges from five to fifteen out of 10,000 births. The different estimates are based on slightly different definitions of autism.

It is three times more common in boys than girls and is rarely found in more than one child in a family.

Autism can be caused by a number of factors, but the cause in the vast majority is not known. It is known that autism is caused by biological, not psychological, factors.

✧ Characteristics ✧

Some babies show signs of autism from infancy. They may not like to cuddle and may show little interest in their families.

Typical characteristics of autism are often described as:

- difficulty relating to people, objects and events;
- repetitive movements such as rocking and spinning, head banging and hand twisting;
- insistence that the environment and routine remain unchanged;
- avoidance of eye contact;
- verbal and nonverbal communication skills are severely impaired;
- use of toys and objects is an unconventional manner, little imaginative play;
- severe impairment of social interaction development; and
- limited intellectual ability.

It should be noted that any one of these characteristics may occur in children with other disabilities. In these cases the term "autistic-like" behavior is used.

✧ Educational Implications ✧

Early diagnosis and educational evaluation of autism are very important, although help given at any age can make a significant difference.

Public Law 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly the Education of the Handicapped Act, now includes autism as a separate disability category. Children with autism will be eligible for special education and related services under this new category.

Until recently, children with autism have been eligible for special education and related

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services under the category of "other health impaired." The regulations (CFR 300.5) to the Education of the Handicapped Act state, "Other health impaired means (i) having an autistic condition which is manifested by severe communication and other developmental and educational problems...". These regulations will be changed to reflect autism as a category included under the IDEA.

Emphasis in education needs to be on helping the child to learn ways to communicate and on structuring the environment so that it is consistent and predictable. Effective teaching includes attention to behavior plans, positive behavior management, and clear expectations and rules.

Many of these methods can be developed in conjunction with parents and followed through at home. Continuity and consistency between home and school environments can greatly aid in the security and progress of persons with autism.

While autism is a lifetime condition, with special training, supervision, and support, many adults with autism can live and work in the community.

✧ Resources ✧

Autism Research International Newsletter
Institute for Child Behavior Research
4182 Adams Avenue
San Diego, CA 92116

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders
Plenum Publishing Corporation
233 Spring Street
New York, NY 10013

Park, Clara, (1982) *The Siege.* Boston; Little Brown and Company.

Powers, Michael D. (Ed) (1989). *Children with Autism, A Parent's Guide.* Rockville, MD; Woodbine House.

Wing, L., M.D., (1980). *Autistic Children: A Guide for Parents and Professionals.* Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press.

✧ Organizations ✧

Autism Hotline
Autism Services Center
101 Richmond Street
Huntington, WV 25702
(304) 523-8269

Autism Society of America
8601 Georgia Avenue
Suite 503
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(301) 565-0433

Institute for Child Behavior Research
4182 Adams Avenue
San Diego, CA 92116
(618) 281-7165

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Información General Sobre

EL AUTISMO

✧ Definición ✧

Según las regulaciones de la Ley Pública 101-476, el Acta para la Educación de las Personas con Discapacidades (IDEA), antes conocido como el Acta para la Educación de las Personas con Impedimentos, el autismo es "un trastorno del desarrollo que afecta la comunicación verbal y no verbal y las interacciones sociales, generalmente evidente antes de los tres años de edad, y que impacta en la educación del niño.

✧ Incidencia ✧

La incidencia, o cuán seguido ocurre el autismo en los niños, varía entre cinco y quince de cada 10,000 infantes. Las diferentes estimaciones se basan en varias diferentes definiciones del autismo.

El autismo es tres veces más común en los niños que en las niñas, y es muy raro encontrar a más de un niño con autismo en una familia.

El autismo puede ser causado por varios factores, pero se desconoce la causa en la mayoría de los casos. Se sabe que el autismo es causado por factores biológicos, y no factores psicológicos.

✧ Características ✧

Algunos niños demuestran ciertas síntomas del autismo desde su infancia. A éstos no les gusta acercarse a sus padres y demuestran poco interés en sus familias.

Los síntomas típicos del autismo son los siguientes:

- dificultad en relacionarse con las personas, objetos, y eventos;
- movimientos repetitivos, tales como balancearse y girarse, golpearse la cabeza, y torcer las manos;
- insistencia en que el ambiente y la rutina deben permanecer siempre igual;
- el niño evita el contacto visual;
- las destrezas de comunicación verbal y no verbal son severamente impedidos;
- el uso de juguetes y objetos de una manera diferente, con poca imaginación;
- el desarrollo de las habilidades para la interacción social es severamente impedido; y
- una habilidad intelectual limitada.

Debe notarse que cualquiera de estas características pueden ocurrir en los niños con estas u otras discapacidades. En esos casos se dice que el niño tiene un "comportamiento autista."

✧ Implicaciones en la Educación ✧

Un diagnóstico temprano y evaluación educacional del autismo son muy importantes, aunque ayuda a cualquier edad puede resultar en una gran diferencia.

Las regulaciones de la Ley Pública 101-476, el Acta para la Educación de los Individuos con Discapacidades (IDEA), ahora incluyen el autismo como una categoría aparte.

Los niños con autismo son elegibles para recibir educación especial y servicios relacionados bajo esta nueva categoría. [Hasta hace poco los niños con autismo han sido elegibles para recibir

educación especial y servicios relacionados bajo la categoría de "impedimento de la salud" (other health impaired").]

El énfasis educacional debería ser en ayudar al niño para que éste aprenda a comunicarse y en estructurar el ambiente para que éste sea consistente y previsible. La enseñanza efectiva incluye atención a los planes de comportamiento, administración de comportamiento positivo, y claras expectaciones y reglas.

Muchos de estos métodos se pueden desarrollar en conjunto con los padres y se deben seguir en el hogar. La continuidad y consistencia entre el ambiente escolar y el hogar pueden ayudar en cuanto a la seguridad y el progreso de las personas con autismo.

Aunque el autismo es una condición que dura toda la vida, con entrenamiento especial, supervisión, y apoyo, muchos adultos con autismo pueden vivir y trabajar en la comunidad.

✧ Recursos ✧

Autism Society of America. 1980. *Autismo: Datos Concretos*. Silver Spring, MD: Autism Society of America. (Teléfono: (301) 565-0433.)

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For more information contact NICHCY.